

Iraq: The Test of a Generation
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America faces today our biggest foreign policy test in a generation. The deteriorating security situation in Iraq in the past several weeks vividly emphasizes the difficulties inherent in bringing stability to that country, and is a wake-up call to policymakers in Washington.

Given events on the ground, and the resulting debate that has taken place in this town, it is worth reviewing why we needed to go to war in the first place, why we must prevail, and how our conduct in Iraq fits with America's broader foreign policy principles. The way in which we handle Iraq today will impact the Iraqi people, America, and the world for a generation or more. The costs of failure in Iraq are unacceptably high. The benefits of success, on the other hand, are extraordinary.

Why we are in Iraq

By early 2003, the status quo on Iraq was crumbling and could not be sustained. The international sanctions regime no longer constrained Saddam's ability to spend money as he wished, and the regime was growing stronger, not weaker, under the existing sanctions. At the same time, critics around the world were demanding that those sanctions that remained be lifted. U.S. and British warplanes patrolled the no-fly zones, taking fire from anti-aircraft guns on a weekly basis. America was forced to keep troops stationed in Saudi Arabia, in an overtly hostile environment, with no light at the end of the tunnel. International pressure on Saddam was wavering, and intensified only when the United States showed a determination to deal with him once and for all. Even the renewed inspections in 2002 and 2003 took place only when Saddam was confronted with coalition troops deployed to his borders - an obviously unsustainable situation - and even then he refused to cooperate fully.

We must also remember the mockery his regime made of the United Nations Security Council. He violated no less than 17 Security Council resolutions. If the word of the United Nations is ever to be worth more than a press release, there must be enforcement.

Some have argued that the U.S. exaggerated Saddam's WMD programs, and therefore Iraq posed no threat. It is important to learn precisely what happened to Iraq's weapons, and to examine failures of our pre-war intelligence. For this reason I am serving on the bipartisan commission that will examine WMD-related intelligence. But we must also recall the facts as we knew them in March 2003. U.S. intelligence agencies concluded that Saddam possessed chemical and biological weapons, and might be pursuing a nuclear weapons program. European intelligence services concluded that Saddam likely had active WMD programs. Eight years of UNSCOM inspections concluded Iraq was lying. Even Hans Blix and the UN inspectors assumed the regime was concealing weapons of mass destruction. If Saddam had secretly destroyed these weapons, he had numerous opportunities to document this destruction. But he did not do so.

At the same time, the world was painfully familiar with Saddam's use of WMD in the past, including his barbaric chemical attacks on Iranians and Kurds. We knew that Saddam was by far the most belligerent leader in the region, having invaded and pillaged Kuwait, launched missiles at Saudi Arabia and Israel, killed hundreds of thousands of his own people, and attempted to assassinate a former U.S. president. We also knew of Saddam's past involvement in terrorism, and his hatred of America.

We had three choices - deal with Saddam early, while we could; deal with Saddam later, after sanctions had lost force and he had furthered his weapons ambitions; or simply sit back and hope for the best. The 9-11 Commission has spent months investigating who might be at fault for failing to connect disparate dots, and for inaction in the face of grave threat. In Iraq, the dots were connected.

Even those in Iraq who claim that all WMD were destroyed suggest that Saddam planned to restart his programs once the time was right - presumably, once sanctions had fallen apart, he had his hands on billions of dollars in oil revenues, and international attention was again distracted. But let us assume for the sake of argument that Saddam had forever abandoned his WMD ambitions. Is it then wrong to have toppled the dictator?

I supported humanitarian intervention in order to stop genocide in Kosovo and Bosnia. I wish that the U.S. had acted - with force if necessary - to stop genocide in Rwanda. In neither of these places were America's vital national security interests at stake, though our national values were. Murder in Kosovo and genocide in Rwanda demanded intervention. Time and time again, the world has witnessed vast brutality, done nothing, and then said "never again." But it takes determined action to stop these tragedies. With the final erosion of sanctions, how long would the Kurdish population of Iraq have remained beyond Saddam's reach? How many more mass graves would he have filled, how many more women raped, critics' tongues cut out, children tortured? The U.S., which on three occasions encouraged Iraqis to revolt, had a responsibility to take up this charge, and we have liberated 25 million Iraqis from a state of near slavery.

These are the reasons why we are in Iraq today. Now that we have toppled Saddam and liberated the Iraqi people, we must succeed in our ambition to help bring freedom and democracy to the country. We are not trying to turn Iraqis into Americans. We are promoting values that are *universal*. Iraqis are no more willing than Americans to endure beatings, terror, and a lack of freedom. We can argue about the steps the administration took in the run-up and aftermath of the war. I have my differences, and have outlined some of these in the past. But failure is not an option.

What success requires

We have gotten many things right in Iraq. The coalition has de-Baathified the country, built roads and hospitals, opened schools, expanded investment, and created jobs. Despite the instability, a majority of Iraqis say that they are better off than they were before the war, and just a small minority say that they are worse off. Even more - 71 percent in the latest Oxford

Research poll - say they expect things to be better in a year than they are now. Ironically, the Iraqi people today are more optimistic about their future than many Americans are.

Iraqis today are of two minds in their attitude toward the coalition. Apart from a relatively small minority of ex-Baathists and extremists, Iraqis are happy that Saddam is gone, and thankful that the U.S. toppled the dictator. They also understand that the American presence is a stabilizing force in their country. At the same time, they resent foreign occupation. In addition, when it comes to their future, the Iraqi people are understandably hedging. How can they be sure that Saddam's followers won't rule once again? We must make them certain through our firm resolve to prevail in Iraq.

First, we need a constructive domestic debate. Rather than discuss how we can best achieve our objectives in Iraq, some have preferred to use the issue as a political weapon to score points in this election. This is simply irresponsible - the stakes in Iraq are too high. We must show bipartisan resolve to prevail in Iraq, and not allow the insurgents to believe that they are winning minds in Washington. Our troops, the Iraqi people, and the world need to see unified American political leadership.

Second, the President must make clear to the American people the scale of the commitment required to prevail in Iraq. He needs to be perfectly frank: bringing peace and democracy to Iraq is an enormous endeavor that will be very expensive, difficult, and long. The American people understand that we are fighting for the freedom of others, and I believe they are willing to sacrifice. The President needs to be as straightforward and specific as possible when he describes these necessary sacrifices.

Part of this sacrifice starts here with lawmakers in Washington. We need to make tough decisions about where our wartime priorities lay, and this means that we have to reassess our domestic priorities. As the appropriations season starts up, it is clear that we simply cannot have it all - tax cuts, pork for the special interests, ever-growing entitlement programs, and war in Iraq. Congress cannot demand discipline and sacrifice only of the men and women fighting in the desert. We need it at home as well.

Third, it is painfully clear that we need more troops. Before the war, the U.S. Army Chief of Staff said that several hundred thousand troops would be necessary to keep the peace. While criticized at the time, General Shinseki now looks prescient. I have said since my visit to Iraq last August that our military presence is insufficient to bring stability to the country. We should increase the number of forces, including Marines and Special Forces, to conduct offensive operations. There is also a dire need for other types of forces, including linguists, intelligence officers, and civil affairs officers. We must deploy at least another full division, and probably more.

Troop contributions from NATO are welcome, and we should continue to seek troops from other countries. But the fundamental truth is that we face the security task mostly alone. Our coalition partners - and the British forces in particular - are helpful, but they are not present in the strength and numbers necessary to provide security. The newly trained Iraqi security forces are not yet prepared for the job and many have been unwilling to fight. There have been

exceptions, including groups of Iraqi forces that courageously battled insurgents in Falluja. In the short run, however, the United States will have to shoulder the responsibility for reestablishing security. We must ensure that we have the men and materiel necessary to do the job.

Fourth, we must ensure that our understandable efforts to minimize collateral damage in Fallujah are not seen as a victory for the hardest of the hard core killers. Our goal in places like Fallujah where unreconstructed Baathists, former intelligence officers, and foreign jihadists converge should be to capture or destroy them. We face implacable enemies who reject a peaceful role in the new Iraq. We must be careful not to be seen by Iraqis as responding to direct attacks with accommodation.

Fifth, while the burden in Iraq will be primarily ours, we must do more to reinforce our friends and allies who are sharing the burden, risks, and responsibilities in Iraq. Bulgarians, Britons, Spaniards, Italians and many other nationalities have been wounded and killed in Iraq. Our enemies seek to divide our coalition. They do it through bombs in Madrid and through kidnappings in Iraq. Every leader who has sent personnel to join the coalition in Iraq has done so out of principle, not out of political expediency. I am distressed to hear some denigrate the contributions of our allies - from the young democracy in Georgia that is tripling its troop contribution, to our British and Australian friends who were with us on the ground before the first shot was fired. Those who sacrifice with us in adversity are our truest friends.

Sixth, we need to stop any irresponsible third country interference in Iraq. We must make clear to Syria and Iran that any meddling in Iraq will have dangerous consequences for the security of their own fragile regimes. In addition, we must be exceedingly cautious about Iranian government involvement in a political settlement. Iran's interests in Iraq and American interests in Iraq are not, to put it mildly, the same. I was concerned to see the Iranian diplomatic delegation that visited Iraq last week attempt to mediate between U.S. forces and those of Moqtada al-Sadr. If the Iranian government has the influence to restrain the insurgency, it presumably has the capacity to encourage it, should it decide to do so. The answer to Sadr's challenge is not in Tehran but in Iraq.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we need a political strategy. We do not currently have one. With no one identified to lead Iraq after the transfer of sovereignty, and with some questioning even the date for the handover, there is a political vacuum in Iraq today. We need to reduce the uncertainty as soon as possible by announcing our plan for events after June 30.

This begins by sticking to the turnover date. Were we to decide now, 70 days before the long-scheduled handover, that the U.S. will continue the occupation, we would feed the suspicions of all those who believe that we are in Iraq for conquest, rather than liberation. We must also announce, as soon as possible, who will lead the country and make clear that these new leaders, however chosen, are transitional, and will see the country through to elections. An Iraqi government will only have full legitimacy when it is freely chosen by the people, as called for by the transitional constitution.

The UN also has a role to play. UN participation in fashioning a political solution may increase the legitimacy with which the new regime is viewed by foreign countries, and make it easier for others to contribute troops and assistance. We should not fool ourselves, however, into thinking that we can turn over the problem of Iraq to the United Nations. Recent polls indicate that Iraqis do not equate a UN veneer with political legitimacy, and many distrust the institution that managed the Oil for Food program, which enriched Saddam at their expense. The UN, while it has a number of capable diplomats on its staff, cannot alone solve this political situation, and Kofi Annan has said recently that the security situation may preclude a significant UN presence in the near future. The UN can help, but it is no substitute for U.S. leadership.

Nor is it a substitute for transferring real political authority to the Iraqi people, which must be our urgent goal. A strong American role in Iraq's security is critical, but we must move to transfer decisionmaking power to the Iraqis as soon as possible. The June 30 handover must mean more than the transfer of policymakers from CPA headquarters to the new U.S. Embassy.

The risks of failure and the benefits of success

We have toppled Saddam, and we have the responsibility to finish the job - to place true sovereignty in the hands of the Iraqi people. But what if we fail? Let us be clear about the likely outcome of our leaving Iraq prematurely. In overthrowing Saddam Hussein and the apparatus of Baathist rule, we shattered a system built on total oppression. We are now helping the Iraqi people construct a new order, but we aren't there yet. If we leave, violence will fill the vacuum as groups struggle for political power, and we risk all-out civil war. At the very least, scores will be settled, warlords will reign, and the violence we see today will pale in comparison to the bloodletting. And we will repeat in much starker terms the mistake we made in 1991.

If we leave, we will pay a dear price as Americans. For years, al-Qaeda used our withdrawal from Somalia as an example of our lack of resolve. The lesson was clear - inflict enough pain on Americans, and you will achieve your aims. If our enemies succeed in Iraq, they will have taught the world the lesson of Mogadishu a hundredfold.

If we leave, we doom reform in the Arab world. Why should other Arabs embrace democracy and freedom when it cannot take root even after a wholesale regime change in Iraq?

If we leave, we risk turning Iraq into a failed state, handing its neighbors - including leading terrorist sponsors Iran and Syria - a prime opportunity to expand their influence in the region, and creating a breeding ground for terrorism.

But if we succeed in stabilizing the country, in building a new government to which we hand sovereignty, in establishing a political system based on freedom and democracy, what will we then have accomplished?

If we succeed, we will have affirmed the universal values upon which this country was founded, and on which our foreign policy must be based - that all men and women are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. That people everywhere in the world, not just in the West, deserve the same rights and freedoms we enjoy. I do not

believe that there is an Arab exception any more than there was a black African exception, an Asian or a Latin exception.

If we succeed, we send a message to every despot in the region that their day is done - that no people will tolerate forever leaders who deprive them of liberty.

If we succeed, we help create in the center of the Middle East a representative and humane government that provides an example to the region. We help bring an end to the political repression and economic stagnation in which extremist roots grow. People in the region can then express their views within the political system, rather than being forced to its margins. They will have access to economic opportunity that will bring them hope, rather than despair.

Is this scenario unrealistic? I am not willing to condemn millions of Arabs to repressive government for another generation. Let's look at what Iraqis believe about their own future. In the Oxford Research poll I cited earlier, Iraqis were asked to select the type of political system they prefer. By far the top response - the response that garnered more support than an Islamic state or a single strongman - was Iraqi democracy. Over 85 percent of Iraqis polled said that they agreed that Iraq needs democracy "at this time." And Iraqis are not the only people in the region who yearn for freedom. As the UN's 2003 Arab Human Development Report indicates, Arabs topped the worldwide list of those saying "democracy is better than any other form of government," and they expressed the highest level of rejection of authoritarian rule.

Just as the status quo in Iraq was unsustainable in early 2003, today the status quo in the Middle East is a clear and present danger. Every year the population of unemployed, disaffected and politically disenfranchised youths grows. Lacking freedom of expression and assembly, with no access to the ballot box and few political and economic rights, some individuals will find no outlet but extremism. And we will pay the price.

Our foreign policy principles

I know the debate over what to do in Iraq is part of the larger debate over how to use the preeminent position of the United States in the world. No one can foretell how long we will stand astride the world with unmatched power. We must use our power now to shape the world for the future, to guarantee that future generations here and abroad will live in freedom, democracy, and prosperity.

We do not use American power to establish empire. We do not spend our blood and treasure for territorial gain, nor for oil, nor to enrich our corporations. We act in Iraq as we should act in the world - to bring lasting liberal order to the globe. Our power must be directed in ways that bolster freedom, democracy, economic prosperity, international institutions and rules.

In Iraq our national security interests and our national values converge. Iraq is truly the test of a generation, for America and for our role in the world. Faced with similar challenges, previous generations of Americans have passed such tests with honor. It is now our turn to demonstrate that our power, ennobled by our principles, is the greatest force for good on earth today. Iraq's transformation into a secure democracy and a force for freedom in the greater Middle East is the calling of our age. We can succeed. We must succeed.